

Peace be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

Two programs ago, we learned how the prophet of God, Jeremiah, warned his fellow Jews that if they did not heed the Word of God and repent of their sins, God would allow the soldiers of Babylon to come in, destroy their country, and carry them far away. Most of the Jews paid no attention to Jeremiah's warnings. Consequently, the army of Babylon came from the east, destroyed Jerusalem, broke down the temple and took the Jews captives, transporting them to Babylon, just as the prophet Jeremiah had predicted. **Thus the Jewish people were dispersed, because they refused to obey the word of God's prophets.**

But could the Jew's unfaithfulness frustrate God's faithfulness? Never! Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah told the Jews, who were now captives in Babylon because of their sins. He said to them:

*This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ..."When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to [Jerusalem]. **For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.***

With this declaration, the prophet Jeremiah was informing the Jews that even if they had forgotten God, **God had not forgotten them!** After seventy years, God planned to bring them back to the land of their ancestors. This is what Jeremiah told the Jews who were captives in Babylon. Truly, **God is faithful** and He keeps His covenants. God had not forgotten that He had promised to bless all the nations of the world through the

descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. God had not forgotten that He purposed to entrust His Word to the Israelites so that they might pass it on to all the descendants of Adam. In our study we have seen how God chose His prophets from among the Jews, inspiring them to proclaim His holy Word and write it down for the people of future generations. We know how God placed the book of the Torah in the mind of Moses and the hymns of the Psalms in the heart of David. We have seen similarly how God inspired other Jews like Joshua, Samuel, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel to write the Word of God. We have observed how all the Writings of God's prophets announce the wonderful plan which God designed to send forth the Savior of the world through the nation of Israel.

Today we will see how **God brought the Jews back** to the land of Judah where the Messiah was to be born, thus moving forward with His plan to bring the Messiah into the world. We will learn how the Jews returned to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity, just as the prophet Jeremiah had predicted.

As we begin reading, let us remember that the land of Babylon was now called Persia, because Persia had conquered Babylon. Reading in the book of Ezra, chapter one, the Scripture says:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel... Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, everyone whose heart God had

moved, prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.

Did God fulfil what He had promised long beforehand through the mouth of Jeremiah, His prophet? Of course He did! We have already seen how God allowed the king of Babylon to **destroy** Jerusalem, and break down the temple of God-**precisely as Jeremiah had prophesied**. And now we see how Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded any of the Jews who so desired, to return to their land and **rebuild** the temple and the city of Jerusalem-**again precisely as the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied**. Truly, the Lord is the King of kings. He is the One who controls the times and the seasons. All that He declares will happen! The prophet Solomon wrote: *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases."*

Next, the Scriptures describe how a group of Jews left the land of Persia and traveled back to the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. A Jew named **Zerubbabel** was their leader. When they came to Jerusalem, they were troubled greatly because the whole city was destroyed, and the temple of the Lord which Solomon had built was in ruins. Nothing was left there except broken pieces of stone and ashes.

Thus the Scriptures relate how the Jews first had a meeting in the place where the temple of the Lord had been. There they rebuilt the altar of sacrifice and sacrificed some animals. Together they thanked and praised the Lord for protecting them in Babylon and Persia for seventy years and for bringing them back to their homeland. God was with those Jews, to help them and strengthen them--so that after many trials

and many years of hard work--**they were able to rebuild the temple of the Lord, the city of Jerusalem, and the walls that surrounded it.**

Perhaps some of you are asking, "What relevance does the story of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem have for us?" Friends, the return of the Jews to their land is very important because it was in that land of **Judah**, the southern part of Palestine, that **the Messiah** would be born. It was necessary that the Jews return to the land of Judah so that the Redeemer of the world--**your Redeemer**--could be born there!

At the time of the Jews' return to Jerusalem, God provided a prophet by the name of **Zechariah** or *Zakaria* in Arabic. This Zechariah is different from Zechariah, the father of the prophet John, who is known as *Yahya* in the Qur'an. God sent Zechariah to strengthen the Jews' faith in God and His promises. Zechariah had an important message to deliver. The time appointed by God to send forth the Messiah was drawing closer! Only five hundred years remained before the Redeemer would come into the world.

Let us examine some of the words that God placed in the mind of Zechariah. Reading in the book of Zechariah, chapter one, the Scripture says:

*The word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo: "The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. **Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.'** But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers?"*

Did you hear **the warning** the prophet Zechariah gave to the Jews? He said to them, *"The Lord was very angry with your forefathers! Do not be like your forefathers!"* Why was God angry with the Jews' forefathers? God was angry with them because **they did not heed the words of the prophets** that He had sent to them. That was why they ended up as captives in Babylon. Their forefathers were religious, but God was not happy with them because they ignored the words of the prophets. The Jews of that time were like people of today who say, "Of course we believe all the prophets!" However, it is obvious that they do not really believe God's prophets, because they do not heed **what the prophets have written** in the Holy Scriptures. They have a **religion**, but they have no personal **relationship** with God Himself. That is what most of the Jewish ancestors were like. They did not appreciate the words of the prophets. They honored God with their **lips** but they did not receive His Word into their **hearts**. Therefore, God sent His servant Zechariah to the Jews, to warn them so that they would not follow the example of their ancestors who had "God, God, God!" on their lips, but ignored the Word which God had sent to them through His prophets.

After Zechariah warned the Jews, he began to tell them about **the Redeemer** who was to come. We do not have time today to read everything that the prophet Zechariah wrote concerning the Messiah, but we can read a few excerpts.

In the book of Zechariah, chapter nine, the prophet Zechariah prophesied that **the Messiah would enter Jerusalem, riding on a donkey**. He said, *"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and **riding on a donkey**, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

In chapter eleven, Zechariah penned a remarkable prophecy which we do not have time to explain in detail. One of the events Zechariah predicted was that **the Messiah would**

be sold for thirty pieces of silver. The prophet Zechariah wrote: *"I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me **thirty pieces of silver**...So I took the **thirty pieces of silver and threw them in to the house of the Lord**..."*

In chapter twelve, Zechariah prophesied that the Jews would not only sell the Messiah, but would even kill Him! He said: The Lord says,

*"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, **the one they have pierced**, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son....If someone asks him, **'What are these wounds on your [hands]?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'**"*

With those words Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would have wounds (scars) in His hands. Where would He get these wounds? His fellow Jews would persuade the Romans to crucify Him. The Romans would then nail His hands and feet to a cross and later pierce His side with a spear. Everything happened exactly as Zechariah predicted. What the prophet Zechariah wrote is in **perfect harmony** with what the prophet David prophesied hundreds of years earlier in the Psalms, when He wrote concerning the Messiah: *"They have pierced my hands and my feet."*

Friends, God wants us to know that **the death of the Messiah on the cross is the most important part of the plan** that He had designed long ago to save the children of Adam from the penalty of their sin. **The righteous Messiah had to suffer and die for the unrighteous! That is the message of all of God's prophets.** Is all of this clear to you? Do you understand what Zechariah prophesied about the Messiah some five hundred years before the Messiah was born? Do you really believe **the message** of the prophets--that the Messiah would suffer and die and, as the first to rise from the dead,

would proclaim forgiveness of sins and a place in Paradise to all who believe in His name? **Do you believe the prophets?** (See Acts 26:18-27) Or are you like the Jews, who honored God's prophets with their lips, but did not believe their message?

Concerning the message of the prophets, the Scriptures declare:

"Do not treat prophecies with contempt." "We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." "Do you believe the prophets?"

Thank you for listening. God willing, in our next program we will hear a word from the prophet who wrote the last book of Holy Scripture before the Messiah came into the world....

God bless you as you seek to give an honest answer to this important question from the Word of God:

"Do you believe the prophets?"

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This series was originally written by P. D. Bramsen

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